



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
August 14, 2015

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State Departments of Health and Agriculture Urge Residents to Avoid Blue-green Algae

BISMARCK, N.D. – Hot summer weather can contribute to the production of blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, in bodies of water that are used by people, pets and livestock. Exposure from ingesting affected water can cause illness in people and animals, and can result in death. There are no known antidotes for the toxins.

The North Dakota Departments of Health (NDDoH) and Agriculture (NDDA), Animal Health Division, urge the public to avoid contact with or swallowing water affected by blue-green algae, and to protect their pets and livestock from waters that are affected. Recent tests have indicated the presence of microcystin, a type of cyanotoxin, in Homme Dam near Park River, where officials have issued warnings against exposure to the water at that recreational site.

Blue-green algae discolor the water they live in, and can cause foam, scum or mats to appear on the surface. NDDoH can test water for evidence of toxins, and if they are detected, can issue warnings to the public. However, because it can take time to test water, people are urged to err on the side of caution and avoid waters that look discolored or scummy, or that have a foul odor.

According to Dr. Susan Keller, state veterinarian, these algae blooms are most common in North Dakota in late summer, and it only takes a few hot days, like the ones we have been experiencing recently, to cause the algae to bloom. “Blue-green algae normally can be found in many lakes and pasture watering holes,” Keller said. “Reports of blue-green algae in Walsh County remind us to be on the alert for algae blooms throughout the state.”

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Blue-green algae blooms can produce poisonous cyanotoxins. People and animals that swallow water containing cyanotoxins can become sick with severe diarrhea and vomiting; numb lips, tingling fingers and toes; dizziness; or rashes, hives or skin blisters. Children are at higher risk than adults for illness because their smaller size can allow them to get a relatively larger dose of toxin.

The Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Animal Health Division, recommend these steps to avoid exposure to cyanotoxins:

- Respect any advisories announced by public health authorities. If you see posted signs or hear messages to stay out of a certain body of water, respect the warning.
- Do not swim, water ski or boat in areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum or mats of green or blue-green algae on the water.
- If you accidentally swim in water that might have a cyanobacteria bloom, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.
- Do not let pets or livestock swim in or drink from areas where the water is discolored or where you see foam, scum or mats of algae on the water.
- If pets (especially dogs) swim in scummy water, rinse them off immediately – do not let them lick the algae (and toxins) off their fur.
- Do not irrigate lawns or golf courses with pond water that looks scummy or smells bad.

For more information about the effects of blue-green algae blooms on pets and livestock, contact the Animal Health Division, North Dakota Department of Agriculture at 701.328.2655. For more information on public health issues, contact Mike Ell, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.5214.

– 30 –

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